

Administration of Barack Obama, 2012

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With President-Elect Enrique Pena Nieto of Mexico

November 27, 2012

President Obama. Well, it is my great pleasure to welcome President-elect Pena Nieto to the Oval Office and to the White House. This is a longstanding tradition where—almost unique, I think, in the relationship between countries—we meet early with the President-elect of Mexico because it symbolizes the extraordinarily close relationship we have between our two countries.

Over the last 4 years, I've been able to work with President Felipe Calderon, and I think we established an excellent working relationship, so I wish him all the best in his new life.

And I'm very confident that I'm going to establish a strong personal, as well as professional, relationship with the President-elect, who, I know, has an outstanding reputation for wanting to get things done.

Now, President Pena Nieto, I think, represents the close ties between our two countries, because I understand that he lived in the United States in Maine for a year, where the winters are even worse than Chicago, my hometown. [*Laughter*]

But I think that's representative of the strength of the relationship between the United States and Mexico. It's not just a matter of policy, but it's a matter of people, as represented by the many U.S. citizens who travel to Mexico, who live in Mexico, and obviously, the incredible contribution that Mexican Americans make to our economy, our society, and to our politics.

I know that President Pena Nieto has a very ambitious reform agenda, and we are very much looking forward to having a fruitful discussion here today about not only how we can strengthen our economic ties, our trade ties, our coordination along the border, improving our joint competitiveness, as well as common security issues. But I think what I know the President-elect is also interested in is a discussion about both regional and global issues, because Mexico has become not simply an important bilateral partner, but is today a very important multilateral, multinational leader on a whole range of issues from energy to climate change. And we look forward to working with Mexico not only on regional issues, but also on global issues.

And just as President Pena—President-elect Pena Nieto's reform agenda is of great interest to us because what happens in Mexico has an impact on our society, I know he's interested in what we do as well on issues like comprehensive immigration reform. And I'll be sharing with him my interest in promoting some issues that are important to the United States, but ultimately will be important to Mexico as well.

So, Mr. President-elect, I want to welcome you. Congratulations on your outstanding victory. Vice President Biden will be leading our delegation to your Inauguration. We only send the Vice President to Inaugurations when the country is really at the top of the list in importance to us. And so we just want to wish you well, and I look forward to an excellent relationship in the years to come.

Thank you. Thank you very much.

President-elect Pena Nieto. Thank you very much, President Barack Obama. It's truly a great pleasure to be here with you. I feel so happy, and thank you for your hospitality. This is of course my first visit as President-elect of Mexico, and I also want to congratulate you for your victory last November 6 for your second term as President of the United States. I of course wish you great success, and I know you have a great task before you, but I know—I trust—that you will be doing a wonderful job.

And I also want to thank you so much, President Obama, for having Vice President Joseph Biden go to Mexico for my Inaugural ceremony next Saturday, December 1. I feel so pleased to be able to have Vice President Biden represent you in Mexico. And of course, we're waiting for him and your delegation with open arms.

And I find that this is an opportunity we only have every 12 years. We're practically beginning our administration, same that you'll be starting your next 4-year term, I will be starting a 6-year administration in Mexico, as you well know, and I think this is really a great opportunity for all of us to have a closer link of brotherhood, of sisterhood, of collaboration, and of course, of great accomplishments we might both have working together.

Yes, and I believe that we have very important tasks before us that are common, as a matter of fact. For instance, we have many common things: we were both Congressmen—legislators, as we say in Spanish—in our respective Congresses in our own countries. And this means we're very sensitive to the needs of our peoples. And we also share a very important vision; the vision, for instance, of creating more jobs. We know this is very important, not only for the American people, but also for the Mexican people, for both of our nations. These are two very important demands in our countries.

And we do have the opportunity to grow, but not only that; we also have the opportunity to integrate North America, to be participating in this part of the world. And I am so pleased that this is the situation we're in.

And of course, as I've said, to increase the integration of North America, to really take advantage of the open spaces we have for our work, and not only in this part of the world, but also with Asia, of course, and just mentioning, for instance, the TPP, the Trans-Pacific Partnership. And my Government is of course very much interested in strengthening this because we believe that this is going to be a great opportunity for all of us.

Yes, and of course, in terms of security, that's another major challenge we all face. My Government has set out to reduce the violence situation in our country. And for that, of course, we have set out to launch a strategy for this purpose. And I will do everything we can for this. We want to have—we have the will to have cooperation, efficient cooperation, with respect, respect for our sovereign states. And of course, in terms of the border, we want our border to be a safe, modern, connected border, legal border. That's exactly what we've set out to accomplish.

Yes, and in terms of the reform for migration, the migration reform, we do have to tell you that we fully support your proposal, sir, and—for this migration reform. More than demanding what you should do or shouldn't do, we do want to tell you that we want to contribute. We really want to participate with you. We want to contribute towards the accomplishment so that of course we can participate in the betterment and the well-being of so many millions of people who live in your country and who are also participating. So we want to be part of this.

And I trust that we'll be able to have a very close relationship in our work, Mr. President. And that—and of course, I want to invite you to come to Mexico, to make a state visit. And as

you know, next year in 2013, we're going to be holding the North American Summit, the leaders' summit. And you're of course invited. And we really hope to see you there. We'll be waiting for you with open arms.

President Obama. Any excuse to go to Mexico, I'm always game. In fact, I'm jealous of Joe Biden. [Laughter] But anyway, thank you very much. Welcome. Thank you, everybody. Appreciate it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. President-elect Pena Nieto spoke in Spanish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Categories: Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : Mexico, President-elect Pena Nieto.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Biden, Joseph R., Jr.; Calderon Hinojosa, Felipe de Jesus; Pena Nieto, Enrique.

Subjects: Defense and national security : Border security; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Mexico : President; Mexico : President-elect; Mexico : Relations with U.S.; Mexico : Security cooperation with U.S.; Mexico : Trade with U.S.; White House Office : Vice President.

DCPD Number: DCPD201200909.